

COVID-19 FAQ #22 Responding to COVID-19

In FAQ #22, you will find information on: reporting; Individual Education Plans (IEPs); member mental health; WSIB claims; COVID-19 exposure; and skin damage protection.

Need a refresher on ETFO's last COVID-19 update?

[View a version of COVID-19 FAQ #21.](#)

Stay informed about your health and safety at work at etfohealthandsafety.ca.

Frequently Asked Questions

What do I need to know about Term 1 reporting guidelines?

The Ministry of Education released general reporting guidelines to school boards on January 25, 2021. The Ministry continues to acknowledge the need for flexibility and understanding by school boards when supporting student needs. They also acknowledge the use of teacher professional judgement when determining how best to communicate progress and achievement that is appropriate and in students' best interests.

Reporting requirements differ from board to board. Consequently, ETFO strongly encourages members who have questions about Term 1 reporting guidelines to contact their school board and/or their ETFO local to seek advice.

Consistent with the terms of the Central Agreement, ETFO encourages educators to use their professional judgement to:

- determine how best to evaluate and summarize student evidence for reporting purposes;
- determine grades/ratings; and
- determine the depth and breadth of comments.

It is important to remember that educators are expected to have assessment data in their record keeping that substantiates the grades, ratings and comments they use for reporting. For further information, please refer to two documents: *ETFO Professional Judgement Guidelines for the Completion of the Elementary Provincial Report Card – Grades 1 to 8* and *Guidelines for Completion of the Kindergarten Communication of Learning Report*. Both documents can be found [here](#).

Do IEPs need to be updated for this reporting period?

Yes. As per *IEP Guide 2004* and *Special Education in Ontario (Draft Version, 2017)*, an IEP is a working document that is reviewed and updated at the start of the student's placement each year, and a minimum of once per reporting period.

When reviewing an IEP for reporting purposes, current content from the most recent IEP should be retained, along with the addition of specifics for distance learning or in-person learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, the communication log can be updated to reflect contact with the family around COVID-19 procedures and protocols, as well as specifics of how accommodations and strategies are being implemented.

I'm under a tremendous amount of stress and pressure, which is causing me to break down both physically and mentally. I am worried about my health. What should I do?

There is an unprecedented amount of stress in the education system at this time. Your health and well-being are critical. If you are experiencing negative health consequences, it is imperative that you contact your health-care provider as soon as possible. There is no shame in taking care of your health and well-being.

Based on your health-care provider's recommendation(s), you may have access to a variety of supports as outlined in your collective agreement. Contract teachers, long-term occasional teachers and most education workers have access to:

- a comprehensive benefits plan through ETFO Employee Life and Health Trust (ELHT);
- 11 sick days, paid at full pay; and
- 120 short-term disability days at 90% pay.

These entitlements are pro-rated to your assignment.

Many members also have access to an Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP) that provides short-term counselling support for covered members. EFAP support may be outlined in your local's collective agreement. If it is not, contact your employer to determine your eligibility to access support through an EFAP.

These supports have been negotiated by ETFO and your ETFO local for your use in times of need; if that time is now, then you are justified in accessing them. Contact your local ETFO office if you have any questions.

I'm struggling with my mental health and wellness. What mental health resources are available to help support educators?

As we know, even at the best of times the demands of working in a school environment make it challenging for educators to maintain an optimal level of wellness. During the pandemic, the challenge to stay well has become even more difficult. To support our

members' wellness, ETFO Professional Relations Services (PRS) has developed a new PRS Matters Bulletin called *Mental Health and Wellness Tips for Members During the Pandemic*.

The bulletin provides ETFO members with information and advice about keeping well. It also provides links to supports that are available to protect and improve their overall wellness during the pandemic. The bulletin has been posted on [ETFO's website](#).

The Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) is the most established, most extensive community mental health organization in Canada. The CMHA provides programs and resources that help support mental health resilience and recovery. The organization has branches in many communities in Ontario; visit [CMHA's website](#) to review supports available in your area.

I believe I contracted COVID-19 in the workplace, but my WSIB claim was denied. What should I do?

If your COVID-19 WSIB claim is denied, contact the ETFO provincial office at 1-888-838-3836 and ask for the on-call staff member for LTD/WSIB issues. Call as soon as possible; ***there are deadlines associated with denials/objections***.

Be prepared to share a copy of your WSIB decision letter in PDF format with the ETFO LTD/WSIB staff member so that they can provide you with detailed advice and next steps related to your specific situation.

If you contract COVID-19, it is important to report it to the WSIB. Even if your symptoms appear to be minor, COVID-19 may have long-term health effects. If you do not file a WSIB claim or object to a denied claim in time, it will make it much harder to get WSIB benefits that you may need later. It is very difficult to challenge the WSIB for entitlement if the injury/disease was not reported at the outset.

Contact your local ETFO office for support with how to file a WSIB claim or visit etfo.ca/link/wsib for further information.

I believe I have developed a mental health condition because of working conditions related to COVID-19. Can I file a WSIB claim?

It is possible to get WSIB entitlement for mental stress. Workplace injuries can take many forms, and not all have visible symptoms. If you need to seek health care or miss time from work because of work-related mental health concerns, you should file a WSIB claim.

Be sure to document your injury using your school board-approved reporting system. Also, speak with your physician about your concerns and the mental health symptoms you may be experiencing. Your physician may elect to complete a *WSIB Health Professional's Report for Occupational Mental Stress* (Form CMS8). Although these

types of claims are often denied, if you do not file a WSIB claim or object to a denied claim in time, it will make it much harder to get WSIB benefits that you may need later.

Continue to take all appropriate health care measures, document your symptoms, appointments and treatments, and complete all required WSIB forms to support your application now and, potentially, for a future claim.

Contact your ETFO local office or visit etfo.ca/link/wsib for information on how to file a WSIB claim.

Our staff room gets busy and people often have their masks off. How can I stay safe?

When taking a break from the classroom, it's important not to take a break from health and safety precautions. There is some evidence that transmission may happen during meal and break times, in particular. The Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development [has released guidance](#) on staying safe at meal and break periods.

Your employer needs to make sure that staff follow these rules both when you are working and on break. The break area should be arranged in such a way that it allows for everyone to sit at least two metres apart. This may mean that some furniture needs to be moved or additional locations for taking breaks need to be designated. Visual markings, signs and reminders will help control the flow of people and maintain safety.

Just like other areas in the school, the ventilation in staff rooms and break areas should be adequate or supplemented with additional air filters.

What can I do with my class to help reduce the risk of COVID-19 during cold weather?

Consider the following:

- Remind students to ensure their hands are dry before putting on gloves or mittens.
- If masks are worn outside and they become wet or frozen, they need to be replaced. There will need to be a sufficient supply of masks for students and staff.
- Neck warmers and scarves are not to be used in place of masks; they do not provide the same source control as they are not made of the recommended material and layers, and do not form a seal around the nose and mouth.
- If students are not wearing masks outdoors, physical distancing of two metres must be maintained, where possible.
- Limit the use of playground equipment to one cohort at a time and encourage physical distancing. Playground equipment being used during the winter does not require routine cleaning or disinfection unless visibly soiled.
- Sports equipment taken outdoors needs to be cleaned and disinfected between cohorts.
- Remind students not to cough, sneeze or wipe noses into their gloves or mittens; they should use a tissue. There should be an ample supply of tissues to take outdoors and for when they return, as students may temporarily develop a runny nose from the cold.

Please note that a runny nose, on its own, should not be considered a symptom of COVID-19. For a runny nose not related to cold weather, follow your local public health unit's screening advice.

- When students are putting on and taking off outdoor winter clothes indoors, ensure physical distancing is maintained and masks are worn in accordance with your school board's policy and that of your local public health unit.
- Designate areas in hallways, the classroom and adjacent spaces where students can maintain physical distancing while putting on and taking off their outdoor winter clothes.
- Recess times should already be staggered to avoid overcrowding in hallways.
- If possible, store outdoor winter clothes on alternating or non-consecutive hooks, cubbies or lockers to ensure physical distancing and allow clothes to dry.
- Have students wash their hands with either soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer after removing outdoor winter clothes.

The skin on my hands is becoming extremely dry and cracked due to handwashing and the use of hand sanitizer. What can I do to prevent skin damage?

Damaged skin can increase your risk of other infections, so it is important to follow up with your doctor, if necessary. Here are some ways you can help prevent skin damage:

- When washing your hands with soap and water, use lukewarm water, wet your hands before applying soap, rinse your hands thoroughly, and pat dry with a paper towel or a clean hand towel.
- If you wear gloves as part of your required Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), then part of the procedure for putting them on and taking them off includes washing your hands before and after. Always ensure your hands are dry before putting gloves on.
- Do not use alcohol-based hand sanitizer immediately after washing hands with soap and water as this may increase skin irritation and dryness.
- At school, the soap and alcohol-based hand sanitizer supplied by the school board may not contain moisturizers or emollients/skin conditioners, so for personal/home use, select products that do. Consider unscented hand soaps, cleansers and lotions, as added fragrances may cause skin irritation and dryness.
- If you are using cleaning and disinfecting products at school, make sure to wear gloves when handling, using, and disposing of these products.
- Check your hands regularly for dry cracked skin, and apply moisturizing creams, lotions or skin conditioners often.

For other information, please check [ETFO's dedicated COVID-19 webpage](#).